

# The American Legion



*For God and country*

## ***Suggested Speech***

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## **Flag Day 2012**

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There is only one Flag Day in America, but fortunately for us there are many Flag defenders. Few were prouder than the late Colonel Van T. Barfoot. A World War II Medal of Honor recipient, Colonel Barfoot was not only recently laid to rest under the U.S. Flag but he proudly fought to fly it even at age 90.

In 2009, Colonel Barfoot was told by his neighborhood board that his flagpole was not allowed, Americans everywhere expressed their outrage.

“The association underestimated the fight left in this elderly veteran and now they have to contend with the determination and persistence of Col. Barfoot’s 2.5 million friends in The American Legion,” The American Legion’s National Commander Clarence E. Hill said at the time. “The flag is a symbol of our country. People should fly it proudly. That’s all Col. Barfoot wants to do. If he were desecrating the flag, instead, the association couldn’t do a thing to stop him.

“We proudly stand with Col. Barfoot and say ‘enough already!’ Let him keep the flagpole and fly the flag as often as he wants. He certainly earned that right.”

Do you know something else? Col. Barfoot and his fellow veterans also earned the right for you and me to fly that flag. It was no surprise that the homeowners association backed off and allowed Col. Barfoot to keep his flagpole, but what is surprising is that we don't seem to appreciate our Flag enough until it is threatened.

We see spikes in Flag displays after national tragedies such as 9/11 or the death of a president. We celebrate our Flag when we send astronauts to the moon, win Olympic Gold or observe Independence Day.

But while the Flag can give us great comfort and hope, we should appreciate the freedoms symbolized by Old Glory EVERY DAY.

While it is good for our nation to designate a particular day such as this to specifically honor our national banner, it is up to us to continue its legacy.

The 13 stripes on our flag are not just symbolic of the original colonies but they are symbolic of the founding fathers who hailed from those colonies. They are symbolic of their dreams for a great Republic, dreams that have been forged into reality by all the men and women who have defended this great nation.

George Washington once said of the original Flag, “We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty.”

The United States Flag is the embodiment of our Constitution that proclaims our absolute commitment to defending the freedoms given to us by our Creator.

President Coolidge may have been known as “Silent Cal,” but he had plenty to say about our Flag.

“We do honor the Stars and Stripes as the emblem of our country and the symbol of all that our patriotism means,” Coolidge said.

“We identify the flag with almost everything we hold dear on earth. It represents our peace and security, our civil and political liberty, our freedom of religious worship, our family, our friends, and our home. We see it in the great multitude of blessings, of rights and privileges that make up our country. But when we look at our flag, and behold it emblazoned with all our rights, we must remember that it is equally a symbol of our duties. Every glory that we associate with it is the result of duty done.

A yearly contemplation of our flag strengthens and purifies the national conscience.”

Legend says Betsy Ross created the U.S. Flag. What is not in dispute is that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed misguided protestors to destroy it.

In 1989 the Supreme Court mistakenly ruled that flag desecration laws were invalid because of First Amendment free speech protections.

Yet, the First Amendment’s prohibition against “abridging the freedom of speech” clearly does not include all forms of expression.

Why else would the Founding Fathers have separately delineated protections for a free press, assembly and petition of government redresses if these actions were already “protected speech”?

Wouldn't these additions have been redundant?

As former Los Angeles Dodger Manager Tommy Lasorda says, “Speech is when you talk.”

Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens dissented from the Flag desecration ruling. He wrote, “Sanctioning the public desecration of the flag will tarnish its value – both for those who cherish the ideals for which it waves and for those that desire to don the robes of martyrdom by burning it.

“That tarnish is not justified by the trivial burden on free expression occasioned by requiring that an available, alternative mode of expression—including uttering words critical of the flag...be employed.”

So here we are 23 years later, respecting and honoring the Flag of The United States but at the same time waiting for Congress to act. It will take a constitutional amendment to restore the right of the American people to once again protect their flag from desecration.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would restore to Congress the authority to prohibit flag desecration. Poll after poll shows the overwhelming majority of the American people want to see their flag protected.

Lopsided majorities in both houses of Congress have supported a flag amendment. The House of Representatives has passed such an amendment six times and the Senate failed by only one vote of a needed two-thirds supermajority in 2006.

It's time that they re-visit this issue.

Senators Orrin Hatch and Max Baucus have again introduced the Flag Amendment for consideration in the Senate and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson has done the same in the House. It is up to "*We the People*," to tell our elected officials to pass the Flag amendment and send the measure back to the states.

The American Legion takes it personally when the Flag of the United States is disrespected. As Medal of Honor recipient and retired Army Major General Patrick Brady often says, "If the flag is precious enough to drape over the coffins of our dead heroes, it is precious enough to protect."

Ladies and gentlemen, it is up to us to protect it. It is up to us to fly it proudly. It is up to us to honor it.

But no Flag Day observance would be complete without remembering those who have paid a price for Old Glory.

One such man was Lieutenant Mike Christian.

Lieutenant Christian was 27 when his fighter jet was shot down over Vietnam in 1967. He was imprisoned at the infamous Hanoi Hilton.

As the weeks of his captivity dragged into months and then years, Christian knew that he and his fellow POWs needed a constant reminder of home, and of the values that they had been fighting for.

He began gathering bits of twine and string and paper from the compound, and any berries or plants that he could use to color them.

Fashioning a needle from a piece of bamboo, Christian began the tedious job of sewing a U.S. Flag to the inside of his prison tunic, where it would be hidden from the enemy but still close to his heart.

After months of scrounging, and hour upon endless hour of sewing by the light of the moon – because to do such a thing was forbidden and risked severe beatings by camp guards – the Flag was finished.

Quietly and secretly, Christian removed his tunic and displayed the Flag sewed inside, as he and his fellow POWs saluted it, and whispered their Pledge of Allegiance to it and all that it stood for.

Fellow POW Bud Day recalls that this was the happiest time of each day because it reminded them of home. It reminded them of their loved ones. And it gave them hope that they would once again see the country they loved. Early one morning a Vietnamese guard caught a glimpse of Christian's flag. Christian was dragged away and interrogated.

Throughout the day, his fellow POWs heard his screams of agony as the Vietnamese tortured him and beat him without mercy.

Finally, they dragged him back to his cell, and there they dumped him – unconscious, bloodied and beaten.

Bud Day said that he treated Christian's wounds as best as he could but he had no medicines and there was little that could be done to relieve his agony.

Yet, a few days later – late in the night – there was Mike Christian huddled in a corner, eyes swollen nearly shut, pulling tiny pieces of twine through his tunic with a bamboo needle.

Piece by piece, and stitch by stitch, he was turning the inside of his black pajama shirt, red, white and blue.

Mike Christian paid the price for loving his flag and for loving his country. He left his youth, his health, and much of his soul and sanity in Vietnam. After six unimaginably cruel years, he was sent home. He died just a few years later.

Mike Christian is now part of our nation's history. He is part of our Flag's history.

A Flag is only as good as the people it represents. And for that, America is richly blessed. We must continue to fly the Flag proudly and as we gaze upon that beautiful banner of stars and stripes – remember those who have fought to defend it.

Thank you for being here. God Bless America and God Bless our Flag.

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